

BELMONT MILL, ROOT CELLAR

(Nevada Belmont Mill)

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Approximately 7 miles south of U.S. Route 50 on USDA Forest

Service Road No. 623

Ely vicinity

White Pine County

Nevada

HAER NV-46-J

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

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HAER No. NV-46-J

Location: Approximately 7 miles south of U.S. Route 50 on USDA Forest Service Road No. 623, Ely vicinity, White Pine County, Nevada.
U.S. Geological Survey, Seligman Canyon, Nevada, 7.5 Quadrangle (1992), Township 16 North, Range 57 East, Section 1.
UTM Zone 11, Easting 2060694.30, Northing 14266640.28 (southeast corner of structure) (NAD 83).
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Feature No. F5.

Significance: The Tonopah Belmont Development Company (TBDC) was one of the most important companies created during Nevada's early twentieth-century mining boom. As ore deposits in its central Nevada mines were depleted, the company sought new claims to resurrect its fortunes. In 1926 TBDC built the Belmont Mill near Hamilton to process lead and silver ore from its recently acquired claims in the White Pine mining district of eastern Nevada. The small pilot mill employed the most recent advances in table concentration and flotation mineral processing techniques, and the company erected numerous other buildings and structures to support the mining and milling work. This included a root cellar for food storage adjacent to the boardinghouse. The site was largely abandoned by TBDC after a few years, but later owners used the mill and associated structures for smaller operations. Today, although most of the equipment has been removed, the Belmont Mill site is one of the only intact early twentieth-century mill complexes in eastern Nevada. Importantly, many of the domestic buildings and structures remain to provide a glimpse of daily life there. The mill complex is a tangible reminder of the decline and failure of a once-powerful company and, thereby, of the boom and bust cycle so common in the mining industry. The subsequent modification and reuse of the site for small-scale operations typifies the ceaseless hum of optimism that sustains the mining industry.

Description: The root cellar is located southwest of the boardinghouse (NV-46-I), adjacent to the kitchen entrance on the south end. The cellar was built into the side of the steep hill that rises immediately to the west; it measures about 27'-3" east to west and 14'-6" north to south. Two low walls flank the approach to the root cellar to create a narrow corridor; each of these walls comprises poured concrete on the lower half and vertical tongue-and-groove boards, 3-1/4" wide, on the upper half, capped with a horizontal board. The east ends of the corridor walls are extended by horizontal wood cribs that have been backfilled with earth to further insulate the entry and the cellar. The cellar door in the east wall comprises wide vertical boards on the exterior face, 1-3/4" thick, with 3/4"-thick horizontal boards on the interior face. An original vent at the bottom of the door has been boarded over. Hardware includes original metal strap hinges on the interior side and a more modern latch.

The cellar itself has no foundation, just an excavated earthen floor. The walls are framed with 6" x 6" timbers with notched joints, and these are backed with a mixture of sheet metal (east half of the south wall), 11"-wide horizontal boards (west and north walls and west half of the south wall), and plywood (east wall). The roof comprises 6" x 6" joists, rafters, and ridge beam and is sheathed with boards. A square wood vent on the north side of the roof, toward the west end, provides ventilation. The entire structure except for the east entry was originally backfilled with soil, or perhaps even tailings, to create an insulating berm.

Interior furnishings include boards on the north side of the floor that provide a raised storage platform. The south wall is lined with wood-framed, screened cages with raised board floors, while the west wall features open wood shelving. Remnants of knob-and-tube wiring indicate that the cellar was electrically lighted at one time.

History: See the Narrative Overview in HAER No. NV-46 for a broad contextual history.

The root cellar was probably built by TBDC in 1926 as a support structure for the boardinghouse. In a photograph from ca. 1940, the workshop (NV-46-K) obscures the cellar entrance but the earthen fill (or possibly tailings) used to cover the structure is apparent (see Figure 4 in HAER No. NV-46). The root cellar may have remained in continuous use until the mid-1970s. Oral accounts state that the site's caretaker and sometime boardinghouse operator, Ermyl Dowd, lived in the kitchen end of the boardinghouse from about 1945 to 1975 and that electricity (for refrigeration) was not usually available, if ever.¹ The root cellar would have remained important for food storage throughout this period.

Today the root cellar is disused and in fair condition. The cribs and wood walls of the entry corridor have begun to collapse. Fill material has worked through the roof and walls, creating small heaps at the base of most interior walls. Erosion of the backfill has exposed the southeast corner of the roof structure, and the wood roof vent is damaged.

Sources: See HAER No. NV-46.

Historian: Anne Oliver, Principal, Oliver Conservation Group. Fieldwork for the project was conducted in the fall of 2010. Project documentation was accepted by HABS/HAER in 2011.

Project Information: See HAER No. NV-46 for complete details. In summary, this project was completed under a contract between the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and a consulting team under the direction of ajc architects (Salt Lake City, Utah), in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. The project historian was Anne Oliver, historic preservation consultant with Oliver Conservation Group. Matt

¹ Interviews with Ronald Jordan, 29 September 2010, and Hal (Rod) Jensen, Jr., 1 October 2010.

Wallace, intern architect with ajc architects, was responsible for the architectural measured drawings and completed all fieldwork and final drawings with the assistance of Oliver Smith Callis, draftsman. The photography was produced by Steve Tregeagle Photography under the direction of Steve Tregeagle and with the assistance of Heath Brown.